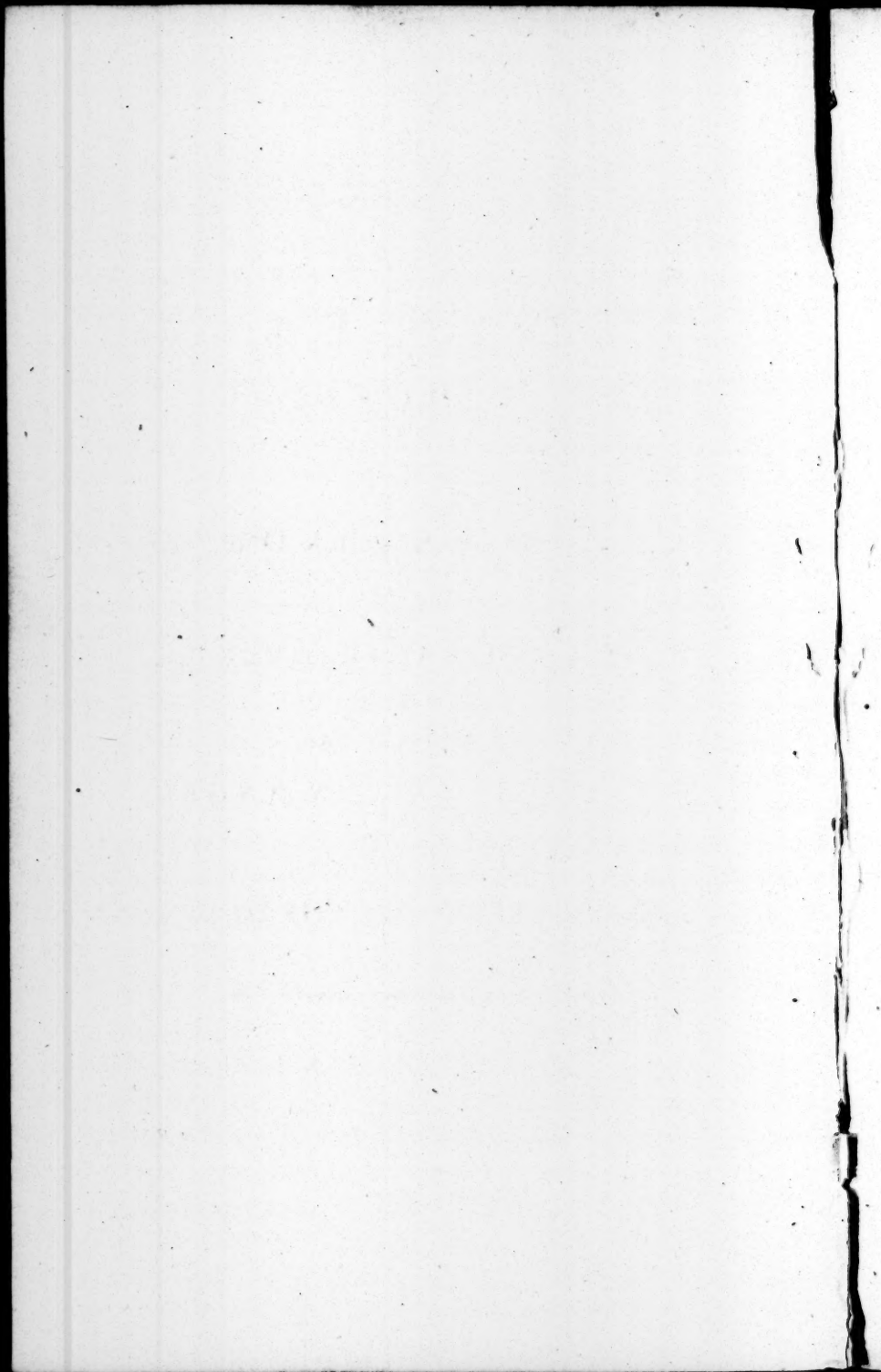


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MDCCLXXIX.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

IN France, the purport of every new book which professes a degree of novelty, is, previously to publication, announced to the world by a miniature view of its contents, called by the French Book-fellers *Prospectus*. In this, the reader is presented with the scope of his author's reasoning, without being obliged to attend him

him thro' its gradations. This custom both renders the plan more intelligible to the generality of readers, by contracting the principal topics into a small compass, and in some measure brings to the test of truth the consequences deduced from them. Since in so short an abstract, which, of necessity, must be perspicuous and connected, the mind easily detects any fallacy that may be concealed, or be rendered plausible in the complication of argument. The
advan-

advantages of this custom I have endeavoured to give the reader, by the plan of reasoning subjoined to the conclusion ; which mode of introducing the design I preferred to the division of chapters, not only for the reasons alledged, but because the work seemed too short to deserve that formality.

A N

E S S A Y, &c.

IT is inconsistent with the idea of a Being perfectly benevolent, that he should form creatures with a power of making themselves unhappy, unless they had deserved such possibility of misery ; for the character of perfect benevolence is to confer felicity, without possibility of its contrary. It is therefore to be concluded, that a Being of perfect benevolence would not have put it in our power to become miserable,
B unless

unless we had merited such possibility.

It may be objected, that the hazard to which we are subject of incurring misery, is very equally counterbalanced by the chance with which we are invested of acquiring felicity; that the ways of good and evil lie equally accessible to our steps; and we that have no reason to complain of punishment on disobedience, when the greatness is considered of the reward on obedience.

As to the first of these positions, the generality of mankind will perhaps demur, the generality of Christians certainly. "Straight is the path, narrow is the gate, few there
" be

“ be that find it.” It may be questioned whether most human beings, had they been consulted before their being called into existence (supposing the possibility) would not have declined entering into this state of probation, if they had been apprized of the dangers and temptations which occur in it; and would rather have acquiesced in non-existence, than hazarded eternal misery, even with the chance of obtaining eternal happiness.

THE next position, “ That the “ ways of good and evil are equally “ accessible,” is also doubtful. That God has not been sparing of opportunities and invitations to the right way, is undeniable: but when we

consider the iniquity of the world, the powerful influence of bad example, the effects of vicious education, which affect and determine tender minds before they are capable of reflexion, it is obvious that the generality of men are liable to fall into evil from the effect of principles instilled into them, or the influence of example exposed to them, before they were capable of discerning their tendency. The good and the evil way will always be accessible according to the prevalence in the world of good and evil; because the power of education, precept, and example, must determine the mind, especially whilst it is in a state that is susceptible of any impression. If the world were good,
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the right way would be at least equally accessible with the evil: but in the present iniquitous state of the world, when temptations and vices are multiplied in such refinement, it is evident that there must be a greater proneness to evil than to good: consequently, "That the good way is not equally accessible with the evil."

It follows, from the confutation of the former positions, that as there is reason to think that many human creatures would (if it had been possible for them to be consulted before their possessing this existence) have declined the acceptance of it, they have reason for complaint of punishment on disobedience, even when the

greatness is considered of the reward on obedience; because their existence seems to have been forced on them without their assent, nay, contrary to their present sentiments.— They will ask, Is it agreeable to justice to put creatures in a way of attaining misery, without some previous demerit on their part? It is an act of benevolence to place happiness within their possession, even without previous merit of theirs; but it is not an act of justice to put them in a path of incurring misery, without previous demerit; for benevolence is not actuated by the merit of an object, but by its characteristic principle; whereas justice always doth consider the merits of an object, and acts agreeably to them :

them : therefore, although we may account for the chance bestowed on us of attaining eternal happiness, by referring to the principle of benevolence, yet we cannot account for the hazard to which we are subject of incurring eternal misery, by referring to the principle of justice.

FARTHER, it may be objected, that the heinous affront offered by the wicked to the divine institutions, will sufficiently justify the punishment threatened on their disobedience ; but it does not seem agreeable to justice, that the sins of threescore, or a hundred years should be punished with an eternity of torment : therefore the affront offered is infinitely inferior to the punishment de-

nounced: This is an argument with which profligates console themselves, and is the parent of the bad effects drawn from that idle notion, that the God of mercy never made any of his creatures to be eternally miserable.

It seems, indeed, impossible, that any sins committed in the space of human life should in justice warrant infinite punishment. A rational enquirer into the divine justice will readily discern, that we must originally have been guilty of some crime infinitely exceeding and justificatory of such dreadful retribution. This crime, Divines tell us, was the grand defection of the first man from the state of innocence which he filled by the goodness of his
 Creator,

Creator. But how is it consistent with that goodness, that the sins of one man should entail misery on his unconscious posterity ? Can human penetration conceive by what means millions that were as yet in the womb of Time, could be concerned in guilt perpetrated many generations before they came into existence ? I know, that many theological Philosophers have attempted to explain the physical cause of our being tainted with the evil propensities of our first parents, in the same manner as with those of our immediate progenitors. But admitting the explanation, it does not consist with perfect justice, that such propensities should be permitted to descend and affect an innocent posterity. The
 physical

physical mode of its entailment we may comprehend ; but the reason for which such cause was permitted to operate, is yet unexplained to us ; nor can we conceive it, as long as we suppose posterity to have been unconscious of the original violation.

THAT God should retribute temporary sin with eternal punishment, is not a more unsurmountable stumbling-block, than that he should have destined from the first period of human existence part of his creatures to damnation. This hypothesis militates more violently against our reason, and ideas of divine justice and benevolence. For in the former case, guilt only meets with excess of punishment ; in the other, actual
 inno-

innocence is punished ; since it has been shewn, that we cannot be accountable for sin without our concurrence, either guilty or innocent.

THE variety of hypotheses that have been framed to account for the justice of Predestination, tend more forcibly than any other argument to shew how difficult it is to adapt the doctrine to human ideas of justice ; and at the same time confess, that it requires no slight degree of ingenuity to give it any semblance of that attribute, consistently with our ideas of it. The doctrine of Predestination has been a subject of dissension ever since it was promulgated ; and it is no wonder that tenets so contradictory, not only to our
ideas

ideas of the divine justice, but apparently repugnant against the other attributes, should be opposed amongst men in all ages.

SOME writers, in order to reconcile us to a doctrine which declares the perdition of a part of mankind to have been decreed before they came into existence, are contented to tell us, that God has an undoubted right to dispose of us according to his own will, and that our interference with his decrees is presuming and impious. That the Creator hath an uncontrollable power over the existence of the creature, cannot be denied : but we are taught to believe God just as well as powerful. The same argument which
bids

bids us believe his power, obliges us to believe his justice also. Now the topic thus used tends to establish *the former*, whereas the question relates to the *other*, attribute. It, therefore, answers the objections against one attribute by instancing the sovereignty of another: so that the premises being foreign to the subject, the consequence is impertinent.

OTHERS have more directly endeavoured to clear divine justice of imputation, by supposing, that ADAM was the representative of his posterity; and that as in the covenant he pledged himself for their obedience, so he was considered in the same light, and acted in the same man-

manner with regard to the fall. We are reminded, that in civil affairs this is an established and equitable practice, as the executors are bound to fulfil all the testamental engagements of the testator; that a man in the course of society is obliged to submit to those temporal evils with which he finds himself surrounded as soon as he is born, and which existed long before; and that succeeding generations always fulfil the engagements assented to by their progenitors. In this proceeding, we are told, that no man will pretend to discern injustice.—This is the only considerable argument that ingenuity can devise in justification of the doctrine; and the analogy is specious.

BUT

BUT it must be observed, that it is in itself unjust, that posterity should inherit evils entailed on them by their ancestors ; as also, it is without merit that they possess the good things so entailed ; but that this is an evil submitted to in society for the prevention of greater : that this law, therefore, is merely adapted to the state of human society, and would not have been adopted, if a better method tending to the same purposes could have been devised. As therefore it is really unjust, we cannot suppose that God would make choice of such a mode to regulate his connexions with his creatures. Besides, a testator always bequeaths some advantage to his executor, superior

perior to the disadvantages with which it may be connected. If a man were to leave to his executor only the latter, would any law compel him to accept them? ADAM left no advantage to his posterity ; his fall bequeathed nothing but evil, without any good from him to counterbalance it ; ADAM, therefore, is not to be understood as the representative of his posterity, in the same light as a testator of his executor.

LASTLY, the human law alluded to, produces only temporal evils ; whereas the divine decree, with which it is compared, is productive of everlasting evils. That mankind in this probationary state
should

should meet with temporary evils, which during his present existence he has not merited, is characteristick of such a state, and is agreeable to the fitness of things; because those evils are intended to try his patience, and to bring him to final happiness. But the divine decree we speak of, is not calculated to that purpose; on the contrary, it contains an irreversible decision of man's fate. It at once gives no room for a trial of his patience, and destroys the possibility of his attaining future happiness: therefore the nature and views of this human law, and of this divine decree, are utterly distinct, and consequently do not admit of analogy.

THE speculative world is highly obliged to those modern Philosophers who have endeavoured to prove the doctrine of Predestination consistent with the justice of the Creator, and the free-will of the creature. But to understand their arguments, it is confessedly necessary to understand abstruse sciences *. The Founder of our religion never could propose to the world a doc-

* “ As to the doctrine of NECESSITY, it
 “ may possibly save some persons not a little
 “ trouble if I here give it as my opinion,
 “ that unless they apply themselves to the
 “ study of this question pretty early in life,
 “ and in a regular study of Pneumatology
 “ and Ethicks, they will never truly un-
 “ derstand the subject.”

Preface to An Examination of Dr. Reid's
 Inquiry, Dr. Beattie's Essay, and Dr.
 Oswald's Appeal, by Dr. Priestley.

trine,

trine, to understand which, it was necessary to understand abstruse sciences; since all that he taught was of the greatest simplicity, and conformity to human apprehension. If it be alledged, that all the rules necessary to regulate human action were delivered with this simplicity; but that the doctrine of predestination is of too abstruse a nature for the comprehension of the generality of mankind, and of little or no connexion with their action; it may be asked, why it is so frequently alluded to; nay, and expressly mentioned in the New Testament? The hearers of our Saviour and his Apostles were of the meaner ranks of mankind. If the doctrine were

of too abstruse a nature for their apprehension, where had been the use of alluding to, or expressing it? And if it have little or no connection with human action, why was so idle an argument adverted to? For it is certain, that the Founder and teachers of our faith propounded no tenet to belief, which was not in some degree an incentive to the morality of action.

Now, if it could be proved, agreeably to our understanding, that every human creature which ever did, and will exist, was concerned in the original guilt, and consequently has merited an eternity of punishment; it is evident, that all shadow of repentment must immediately vanish,
and

and we might more rationally admire the justice and mercy of God, than whilst it was disputable whether we *have* merited such punishment. After we had forfeited all pretensions to eternal felicity, could it be proved, that even then we were invested with a chance of regaining it; the demonstration would strike dumb the mouth of complaint against the providential dispensation, and animate the heart with the most fervent gratitude. A probability of reasoning is all that can be expected in matters not cognizable by the senses; and if we can compass this, our demonstration will effect all that can be hoped for, which is probable conviction.

If then from all that has been advanced, That the hazard to which we are subject of incurring misery, is not equally counter-balanced by the chance with which we are invested of acquiring happiness; that the ways of good and evil are not equally accessible; that we have reason to complain of the punishment on disobedience, even when the greatness is considered of the reward on obedience; that a course of sin during the space of human life cannot from divine justice merit eternal punishment; and that God has from the origin of human existence destined part of his creatures to misery; it should seem necessary, in order to reconcile us to divine justice, to suppose the
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commission of a crime infinitely too great to be included in the space of our present existence ;—it is evident that such crime must have been committed in a state antecedent to the present mode of existence ; and in such a manner, that every human creature which ever did or will exist must have been concerned in the guilt, and will be answerable for it.

IF we allow that what will not last for ever must have had a beginning, it must be admitted that what will last for ever must have had no beginning ; therefore the human soul, as it will last for ever, never had a beginning : consequently, it has existed from eternity. To suppose that it began to act

only with that scene which commenced with mankind, is to suppose it inactive until the human creation; which is absurd, because in that case it could effect no end of its existence. It therefore must have been active before the human creation; and only in the state previous to that period could a crime have been committed adequate to an eternity of punishment.

THE nature of the present system of existence includes the necessity of evil; and it is impossible that man, with his constituent affections, should exist in this system without it. The acquisition of science, the finishing of those faculties which elevate our nature, is attended by inevitable evils;

evils; and unless man were bereaved of his passions, and could vegetate like the "mutum & turpe pecus," the intervention of evil in the world could not be prevented. For the human race to have lived without such intervention, and consequently in a state of innocence, were impracticable, unless their nature had been perfectly different from the present.

DIVINES tell us, that man's nature was entirely changed by the grand defection; that he before had no base inclinations, but was wholly turned to purity. That there might be a being thus innocently formed, is possible; but it could not be man. Take away his passions, which
are

are the constituents of his nature,
and you leave not man.

It is not wonderful that Divines should be obliged to say, that human nature is totally altered from its condition before the fall. It is evidently a supposition in support of an hypothesis. After they had asserted that man was originally created in a state of innocence, free from the contamination of base passions, it became necessary to add, that his nature was changed by the fall : and as this supposition is not warranted by sacred authority, it reflects the greater honour on their ingenuity:

IF

If ever there were a being created in a state of innocence destined to exist in the earthly system, it is therefore certain it could not have been invested with the same passions as we; its purposes must have been different, and in fine its nature. That there was a state of existence previous to, and very different from the present, a philosophical consideration of our mental powers will convince us, whose vigour seems to be oppressed by some load imposed on them, foreign to their nature, and which cannot be brought to any degree of their original strength without great cultivation. There is a secret burthen, which, like the atmosphere on the body,

ever

ever presses the faculties, and prevents them from soaring to their natural perfection. This mental oppression will be allowed by all to originate from the connexion of the immortal spirit with the corruptible body. Now, as this connexion is evidently foreign to the nature of each, and, indeed, as there cannot be conceived two things so perfectly distinct as body and spirit, it may be inferred, that they were not connected always, but only from the time when the body was created. Therefore, as it has been proved that the spirit never had beginning, and that the justice of God never could subject it to so unworthy a connexion without some demerit on its part ; that there was a state of
 inno-

innocence very different from the present system of human existence, and that this state could not be filled by man under the constituent principles of his nature ; it is highly probable that this state of innocence means the state in which the soul was originally generated, and the consequent defection that grand crime which has been the cause of its connexion with a mortal body.

THE theological account of the human state of innocence is irreconcilable to human reason. Supposing, for the sake of argument, an avowed impossibility, that man was formed without those passions which specify his nature, is it in
human

human reason, to conceive what possibly could be the divine intention to do with him? Here you have a being created without any of the passions known to us: whereas it is plain, from the subsequent formation of the woman, that God intended the race should be procreated; or else where was the use of this partner? unless we suppose that she was not originally endowed with the capacities of generation; and that as man was not contaminated with vicious propensities, so his body was not formed with those parts, which, in the present mode, are instrumental to that purpose. But this is a supposition which I am sure that even Moses never imagined, nor would his most rigid believers
 insist

insist on it : consequently, it must be admitted, that the first man and woman were formed with those parts, and that internal conformation which, in the present mode, are subservient to procreation.

Now, if they possessed the parts, they certainly must have possessed the desires (or the latent seeds of those desires) which are necessary to actuate those parts. For it is absurd to suppose, that the instrument towards any purpose would be given without those springs which are to put it in action, and cause it to fulfil the evident purpose of its existence. Or, to close this branch of the argument, it is certain that God made nothing in vain. But fol-

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lows, that man was originally intended to exercise those passions which are necessary to procreation.

As with the corporal endowments towards procreation, Adam and Eve evidently possessed the passions which are necessary to effect it, they probably possessed the other passions woven in our nature. If they possessed one passion, there is no reason to suppose they did not possess another ; and it is certain, that the passion towards procreation, called Lust, includes at least the majority of the other passions, or is even the source of them. Now, it cannot be supposed that this passion did not then, as now, produce its correspondent effects, or (that we
may

may speak as unexceptionably as possible) that it was not equally endued with the power of producing them; the latter supposition is sufficient to our purpose. For if a passion given, whose nature is necessarily to produce other passions, to say that the latter passions were not destined to be made use of, is equally absurd as to say, that the original passion was given without any purpose of being brought into action.

It is plain, then, that Lust, and its concomitants, Hope, Fear, and the whole train of passions, were really intended by the Giver to be made use of; but in a state of innocence they could not be made use of. For Lust, Hope, Fear, &c.

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absolutely suppose, originate from, and are in their nature productive of evil. As, then, they were intended to be brought into action, but could not in a state of innocence, they were intended to be brought into action in a state of sin.

Now it is certain, that if we understand the Mosaical account of the creation and fall in a literal sense, there once was a state of human innocence. We have seen, that the constituent principles of human nature render such a state impossible : consequently, if ever there were a creature placed in a state of innocence, it could not be man. But that a creature was formed in a state of innocence, is difficult to deny.

deny. Let us see, then, the absurdities of supposing that Moses is always to be understood literally.

IN all relations concerning the Deity, it is curious to observe how much of humanity mingles itself. It is impossible to describe any thing in which the Being is concerned which transcends human imagination, without recurring to human ideas and human expressions. To give the Jews a notion of his magnificence, what grossnesses were their instructors obliged to use ! Moses could see only the hinder parts of God, so bright was the appearance ; and David enumerates the celestial angels and chariots. No man, I hope, will insist on the literality of

these expressions. So when God is said to be affected with human qualities, we must not understand them literally. If any person is, notwithstanding, convinced that they should be taken in a literal sense, he would do best to lay down the book, and take his leave of me before we proceed to more avowed differences.

WHEN God is related to have SAID, "Let there be light;" and afterwards to have SEEN the light; no one, I apprehend, can conceive that God strictly *said* those words, or that he afterwards *saw the light*; because in that case he must be endowed with human organs. The Creator, no doubt, hath a perception of objects; and in accommodation

to human weakness, he is related to see them. But it is easy to observe, that the word SAW, is used by Moses in as conformable a relation to the human faculty of sight, as the word SAID to the human faculty of speech. He intended to give his readers an idea of God's *seeing the light*, as much as he intended to give them an idea of his *speaking* after the human manner. That he intended to give them an idea of speaking after the human manner, is evident ; because they could not conceive the Almighty speaking after any manner, excepting such as they had been acquainted with. But to prove that God did not, nor does speak after the human manner, needs no reasoning ; there-

fore Moses, in this relation, is not to be understood literally.

God is said to have walked in the garden. If this is to be taken literally, it must be admitted that a finite space can contain infinity.

WHOEVER conceives that Adam literally heard the voice of God, must believe that the divine appearance is cognizable to human senses : since, if Adam could *hear*, he was certainly capable of *seeing*, the Creator.

I know there are many people who would give up the literality of expression, whilst on the facts they insist strictly. They would say,
although

although they agree that God neither saw nor spoke of his works, nor walked in the garden, nor that Adam heard the voice of God after the human manner; yet that, after a manner infinitely above our comprehension, he perceived and approved his works; and that Adam might hear a voice, such as had been used to convey the commands of God to him; and that the voice might seem to proceed from the recesses of the garden. But in granting this, they give me all the concession I require. For if Moses be allowed to have adapted his expressions to human understanding, why may he not be supposed to relate his facts in a manner the most intelligible to it? It is

certain, that if Moses had declared the divine process of forming the creation, he would have been unintelligible. He therefore relates the original formation to have employed Almighty Power six days. And more fully to adapt his history to the weakness of human comprehension, he says, that the Deity *rested* on the seventh; whereas, it is equally absurd to suppose that Omnipotence should employ more than a moment, or the time of the idea passing in the divine intelligence, in this creation, as to imagine that Omnipotence should require rest after it. In the account of creation, he has evidently conformed his style as nearly as possible to the human level. Whether he was or not

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acquainted with the Copernican system, he evidently shews no knowledge of it, and accommodates his language to his reader. That he was divinely inspired, we have the authority of scripture; but if he had spoken to the Jews according to the real state of things, and not according to their senses, he might have kept all his knowledge to himself. He therefore was obliged to adapt, not his words only, but his ideas to the comprehension of humanity.

MOSES then adapted his ideas to the ideas of his people. In other words, he made choice of ideas familiar to their apprehension, to express ideas which surpassed it. But

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a substitution of one idea to express another, is a direct definition of allegory : therefore Moses used allegory.

LET no person, tender of the reputation of the holy fountain, fear it may suffer from such supposition; since the same reason which induces a man to consider certain parts of the Mosaical history as allegorical, will compel him to accept others in a literal sense. The characters which distinguish a literal from an allegorical history, have been so well defined by Mr. FARMER, that it were impertinent to repeat them. The leading feature of the latter (and which is obvious to common sense) is its deviation from probability and experience.

perience. Now to the man whom, for this deviation, the Mosaical history of the creation and fall affects as allegorical, the succeeding history of the primæval world will appear strictly literal. For whilst he cannot conceive the possibility of God's literally speaking, Adam hearing and conversing with him, the human fall to have been immediately caused by eating an apple, because the supposition militates against his ideas of probability ; he will be obliged to understand the subsequent history of the first ages in a literal sense, because it concurs with his knowledge of experience. Therefore the historical faith of Moses stands unfullied ; since he is no more to be blamed for not giving a literal account of the creation and fall, than

than for adapting to vulgar conception his expressions concerning the heavenly luminaries.

EVERY nation with whose history we are acquainted, is known to give an allegorical account of the history of mankind, and of the world. If amongst men so many fabulous accounts of their national origin were produced, how likely is it, that with respect to the origin of their species, a period so extremely antecedent, their imagination should be unbounded. The extravagant opinions of the Eastern nations no man of sense would understand literally. Every people hath some notion of a great calamity that befel mankind many ages ago, before which they esteem the world to have been

been in a different and more happy state. This calamity is probably the deluge. It is to our purpose to remark, how variously this notion is modified in the various nations of the world! how infinitely it has been allegorised in poetry, and typified in religions. All these are very easily referrible to that calamity, of which we believe ourselves possessed of the true history. In the same manner, how natural is it that an event so long antecedent to that calamity, which is plausibly supposed to have swept away all human monuments, should be enveloped in greater obscurity! and should be imagined after a thousand ways, according to the unbounded suggestions of the human imagination!

That

That Moses does not stand literal amongst such multitudes of religious allegories, we may admit without questioning the divinity of his legation ; since, as it has been shewn, if he had related many things as they really were, he might have kept his knowledge to himself, and his ministry had been useless.

THERE is no point on which the speculations of the philosopher and the theologist have so variously wandered, as on the history of the Fallen Angels. All the light which scripture affords on this subject consists only in allusion ; and the largest information concerning it, is contained in two or three verses of the most unintelligible book that ever was written. If to these we
refer,

refer, and compare with them the remarkable expressions of St. Jude on this subject, it will appear, that there literally were Angels who revolted from the sanctity in which they were created, and committed some act of rebellion against their Creator ; though what that act was, where the Spirits are at present confined, and what is their employment, afford matter of the most different opinion.

THAT this crime was carnality, is a notion now reprobated. The most received opinion refers it to pride. This, of necessity, supposes their discontent with that station in which they had been placed, and their aspiring to the attainment of those

those perfections which belonged to the Creator. That these exalted creatures discovered in themselves numberless imperfections when compared with the Deity, is highly probable. The only objects of their blasphemous ambition, that we can conceive, must have been the attributes, Perfect Power, Perfect Wisdom, &c. For these are the most desirable objects to created beings, if human conceptions be allowed to give us the least idea of the imperfections of other creatures. Existing in a state perfectly happy; excepting in comparison with the Fountain of Beatitude, they were discontented, and wished to possess those incomparable perfections which are peculiar to the Deity.

LET

LET us observe the analogy which this account of the state of the Fallen Angels bears to the Mosaical history of the state of our first parents. They are created in a state perfectly happy, excepting in comparison with that of the Being who put them in it: They aspire at perfections which they expect to place them on a level with Him. These perfections are plainly said to be, Power and Wisdom. For in what consists the promise that is supposed to have excited our parents to rebellion? “Ye shall be as Gods—knowing good from evil*.”

* To prove still more clearly that the Serpent intended to persuade Eve, and that she understood him to mean that ADAM and herself would, by eating the forbidden fruit,

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partake

It is highly probable, that the possession of the divine attributes

partake the perfections of the Creator ; it is observable, that the translations of the Bible render ELOHIM in the former part of the verse in a singular, and in the latter in a plural sense. “ For *Elohim* (God) doth know, “ that in the day ye eat thereof, ye shall be “ as *Elohim* (Gods).” Whereas there is no more reason to translate it singular in the former, than in the latter part ; the term being exactly the same. And it were astonishing if the terms could admit such distinct significations within five words of each other.

BESIDES, it is more reasonable to suppose, that the Serpent proposed to EVE the perfections of God, with whose existence she was acquainted, than of beings whom we cannot suppose her to have heard of. She knew but of one God : and what was she to understand by a proposal to become as Gods ? If it be said that the term may mean Angels, we will not quarrel about the dissimilarity of the terms in English : and in the Original (whose simplicity never allows the smallest difference between words, without implying a difference of meaning) ; but what authority, saving of hypothesis, will

was not proposed by the Fallen Spirits with innocent intentions ; their ambition of them must have arisen from an evil purpose. The Angels either did, or did not know, that to exert them more gloriously than they are exerted in the possession of the Deity, was impossible. If they did not, their ambition must be imputed to design of exerting them more gloriously. But could this be the design, when it could be effected only by committing an act of the

will persuade us, that EVE knew more of the existence of Angels, than of a plurality of Gods ?

It cannot be objected that *Elohim* will not signify the Deity, because (as is frequent) not joined with *Jehovah* ; because *Elohim* is found single in the former part of the verse, and yet is universally allowed to have a singular meaning.

most abominable rebellion and injustice? If they did know the impossibility of more gloriously exerting the attributes, their unspeakable iniquity is at once confessed:—and whether it is not much more probable that they were conscious of this impossibility, I leave to common sense.

THE guilt of a creature endeavouring to divest of his perfections the Creator, will be judged deserving of eternal punishment. If we can conceive an act which merits eternity of punishment, it must be this; and I think it impossible to conceive any other. In perfect consistence with justice, the Deity might immediately have passed the sentence, and commanded

manded it into execution. But we are taught, that God is not always determined by justice: and glory be to the Eternal Majesty, that he permits his mercy to mitigate its decrees!—How agreeable is it to our most sublime ideas of divine benevolence, that the Deity should not, even after this heinous provocation, inflict the punishment which it deserved!—that to the creatures who had voluntarily forfeited everlasting felicity, he should grant a possibility of regaining it!

WHERE there is a chance of acquiring felicity, a chance is necessarily proposed of incurring misery. A state in which these chances meet, is directly descriptive of the human

condition. What state can we conceive more proper to fulfil the gracious concession? If we cannot admit the present hypothesis, we find ourselves, without apparent justice, subjected by a Being of justice and benevolence to temptations, which endanger us of eternal misery, and with no apparent reason made capable of eternal happiness. As the reward is too great for any piety we can exercise, so is the punishment too great for any iniquity we can indulge in this transitory life. We are therefore referred to some state antecedent to the present, in which some wickedness must have been practised equal to the denounced punishment.

THE

THE history of the Fallen Spirits supplies us with a crime of sufficient magnitude to justify eternity of punishment. Man could not commit a crime, in the present period of human life, meriting this punishment. The history of these Spirits, and the Mosaical account of our first parents, to say nothing of the sameness of the term by which their respective defections from duty have ever been marked, bear a close analogy. This is just the sort of state that God (if he chose to extend his mercy) might perhaps chuse as a state of probation for them to endeavour at regaining their forfeited happiness. It is therefore probable that Man is the Fallen Spirit, and that the Mo-

faic account of the state of human innocence is figurative of the divine state of innocence, in which the angelic nature was created ; since it has been shewn that it is impossible that human nature could be created, or was intended to exist, in a state of innocence.

WHAT we are to understand by the garden in which our parents were placed, is remarkably explained to us by St. Paul, who, in the relation of his ascent to the third heaven, expressly calls that place Paradise. And our Saviour on the cross replies to the felon, “ This day shalt thou be with me in Paradise ;” which name could not import a mortal garden. In another
part

part of the New Testament, the voice of Revelation says, " To him that
 " over-cometh will I give to eat of
 " the tree of life, which is in the
 " midst of the *paradise* of God." In
 what sense are we to understand
 these expressions, unless with rela-
 tion to that tree which we read of
 in the Mosaical history of our first
 parents? If we understand the ex-
 pression, *tree of life*, in a literal sense,
 we must either suppose that the
 actual fruit of a tree would be pro-
 posed as a reward for the spiritual
 triumph alluded to, or that the tree
 which is supposed to have flourished
 in the garden of our parents will
 keep sweet for so many ages. The
 tree of life, we are told in Genesis,
 flourished in a mortal garden; in
 Reve-

Revelation, it is placed in the garden of God, in the regions of divine majesty. Whether is it more probable that a tree of this description should flourish in a mortal or immortal soil? a tree whose property is defined to be that of conferring immortality!

THIS tree of life being able to make one "live for ever," cannot be supposed to have flourished in a mortal soil; therefore, if ever there were such a tree, and it literally grew, it must have grown in an immortal soil. But can it be conceived that there ever should grow a tree, either on earth or any where else, containing the power of communicating immortality? This tree was evidently mentioned

tioned in conformity to the ideas of mortality, and means the source of those divine perfections which belonged only to God.

THE literality of Cherubim being placed to guard the entrance into the garden, is given up on all sides; but was never satisfactorily explained: nor never can be, as long as it is applied to a particular action of God upon the earth, for the purpose of dividing part of it. It is therefore allegorical; and probably figurative of those insurmountable obstacles which the Creator has placed against any future attempts of the creature to invade his majesty.

To the credit of this hypothesis, a consideration of our mental faculties will not a little contribute. Our intellectual desires are dissatisfied with the highest enjoyment, and hanker after pleasures more suited to their nature. The most ample comprehension of knowledge produces satiety; and the soul, ever supplied with information, continues to pine after more. It forms ideas of things utterly distinct from any received by the senses, and has sensations to which no earthly impression bears the most distant analogy.

THE only argument I have met with in opposition to the hypothesis of a pre-existence of souls, gives me

reason to think it was never before treated in the view with which it is now offered. “ Some have imagined
 “ that the general depravity of human
 “ nature proceeded from a pre-exist-
 “ ent state; and our propensity to sin
 “ in this world was an ill habit of the
 “ soul, contracted in another by a
 “ voluntary direction from God; for
 “ which reason it is sent into the world
 “ by way of punishment and expia-
 “ tion. But this is mere conjecture,
 “ without possibility of proof; and
 “ has this plain reason against it, that
 “ no man can be punished for his
 “ amendment (as the supposition in
 “ the case runs), who knows nothing
 “ of his offence, because it is incon-
 “ sistent with the nature and end of
 “ punishment, that the offender should
 “ not

“ not be made sensible of his fault,
 “ especially when the punishment is
 “ designed for his amendment. Besides
 “ that, it seems a very improper me-
 “ thod of correction for past offences,
 “ to imprison the soul in a body,
 “ where, by *the flesh lusting against the*
 “ *spirit*, it is every day exposed to the
 “ commission of more.”

THIS is reasonable ; and I am
 happy to find it does not affect my
 hypothesis. The opinion objected
 to, supposes the soul to be sent into
 the body *by way of punishment and*
expiation ; which consequently are
 to absolve it of guilt, without re-
 ference to a future state of punish-
 ment. For it would not be reason-
 able to suppose, that the soul
 would

would meet with punishment, and that eternal, in a future life, after it had suffered expiatory punishment in this. On the contrary, my hypothesis considers the present state as intermediate and probationary; therefore, that the evils we meet with here are intended to try us, whether we be worthy of regaining the felicity we possessed in a pre-existent state.

WHOEVER excepts against this hypothesis, because Moses gives him no reason to believe it, may with equal justice except against the recent discoveries in philosophy, because Moses not only gives him no reason to believe them, but to some of them speaks in direct opposition. It is judiciously observed

ed by Mr. FERGUSON, that "if Moses, instead of calling the moon *a great luminary*, had told the Israelites it was an opaque body, they would have stared at him, and thought him rather a madman than a person commissioned by the Almighty to be their leader.

MANY of the most important phenomena in nature are unknown to the Generality, who find no inconvenience in their ignorance. They are as certain that the sun will rise in the east, and will disappear in the opposite part of the heavens, as the most profound philosopher, and the husbandman can predict and provide for the revolutions of seasons as beneficially

to

to his harvest, as if he could trace the earth through every sign of the zodiack. After the same reasoning, the Children of Israel were as well acquainted with the divine will, from the simple, allegorical account given them by Moses of the original state of innocence, and the consequent defection, as if they had been informed of a pre-existence of souls ; and the depravity of their nature was as forcibly pointed out by relating, that the guilt was contracted in this, as in a former state. The minds of the Jews, it is well known, were not susceptible of any information that was not extremely obvious to their senses ; and it may be supposed that the world, in the tender

state

state

state referred to, would have found much difficulty in conceiving a pre-existence. We know how foreign to the conceptions of a majority of the Ancient World, was the idea of a state of existence after this life ; and can we conceive that the idea of a state of existence antecedent to it should be less inconceivable ? The Jews, in particular, are known to have received no intimation of a future state from their divine Legislator ; and no person will suggest that they found it out by their own sagacity. The same reason, whatever it was, that prevented Moses from divulging the doctrine of a future state, might also induce him to omit the mention of a state an-

tecedent to the present.——He found that all his purposes were answered without mentioning futurity; and might more reasonably expect them to be accomplished without revealing a pre-existence; since it must be allowed, that the former doctrine is much more important towards inciting to virtue, and discouraging from vice, than the latter, which is rather a matter of speculation than an object of practice: so that we may as well object to the doctrine of a future state, as of a state antecedent to this life; both being equally unrevealed by MOSES. But it appears, that he gives more room to admit the hypothesis of a pre-existence,

than the doctrine of futurity : for none of his writings contain the most faint resemblance of the latter ; whereas the former is shadowed out in a very plausible allusion.

THE ordinary reader perceives that the hypothesis of a pre-existence is by no means novel, but was imagined not only by the Platonists, but by the Pythagoreans. The only variation from them in the present disquisition, is derived from lights which were not, neither could be in their possession ; but it is highly probable that the same reasoning led them to the supposition. They were sensible of that load which presses on the intellect ; of the inequality

quality between the soul and the body, the latter continually opposing the noble designs of the former, and seeming to imprison it. They could not account for this junction, even by supposing a future state. For if they believed the present state to be probationary, and preparative for a futurity, still the question might recur, for what reason the spirit was to suffer continual temptations from the flesh, without having done something previously, which merited such alliance? For they might readily conceive, that an infinitely benevolent Deity would not have called creatures into being with a possibility of making themselves

miserable, if they had not forfeited their claim to felicity by some demerit. But their reasonings, though they did not commence, yet terminated in uncertainty; because they possessed no record of unimpeached veracity to render them conclusive, or to illustrate their hypothesis. Had they been apprized of the Mosaiical account of creation, of a state of innocence, and the defection from it, they would, it is probable, have perceived the allegory upon the same principles on which it is here elucidated, and gladly have applied it to their hypothesis. In this sacred history we are presented with an account of creation, related after a manner which could not
 happen

happen literally, but bears an exact resemblance to an allegorical relation.

It has been insinuated, that the present hypothesis may have been in the number of those truths which were too wonderful for the conception of mankind in the early ages, which with greater difficulty might have comprehended a pre-existence than a futurity. The world is now arrived to a maturity of experience and reasoning, which seems able to bear any truths: and though it may be concluded, that the former idea is not very materially influential upon the conduct of mankind (otherwise the

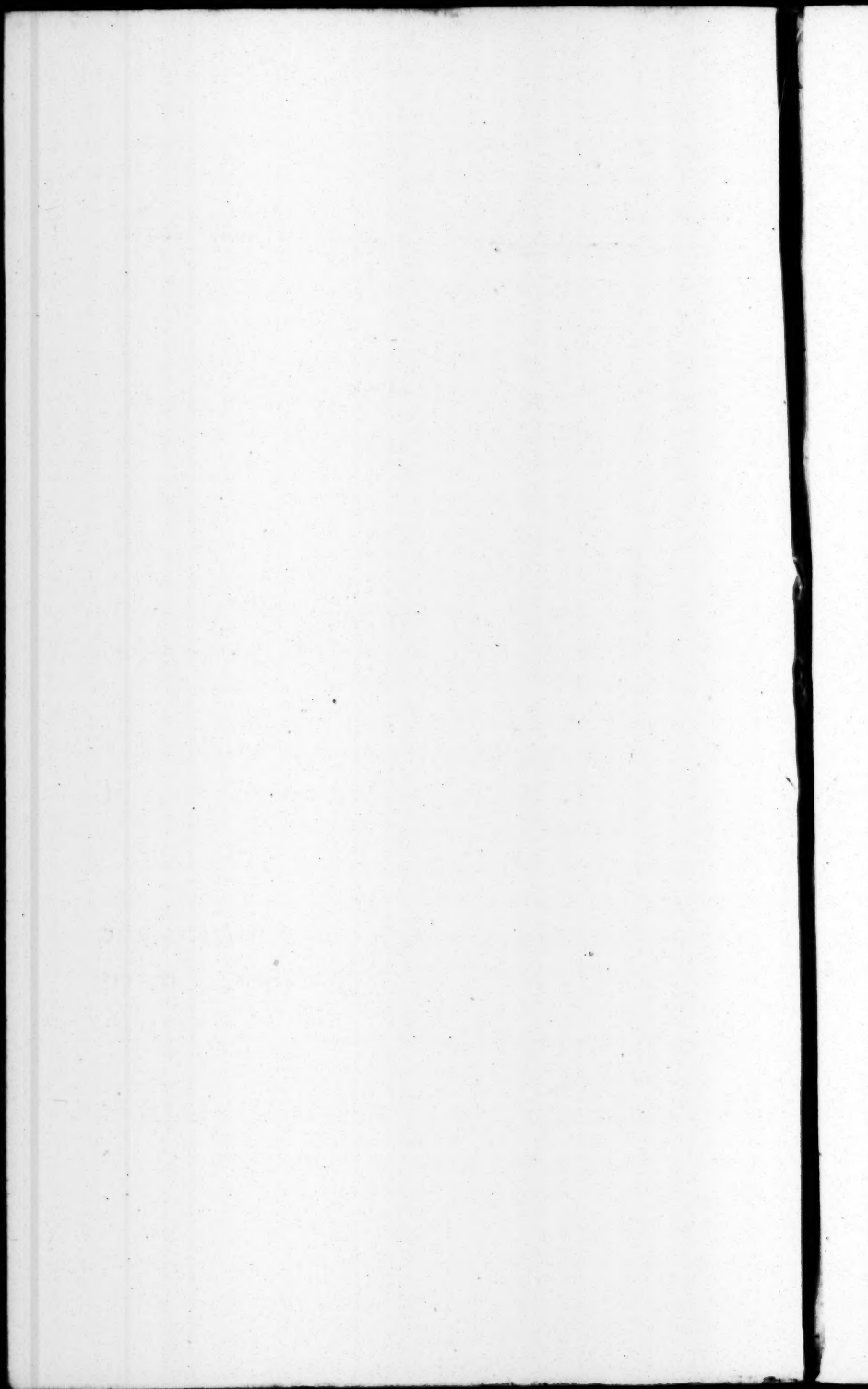
merciful Creator would have divulged it soon after the human creation); yet I cannot avoid thinking, that such as are capable of fully comprehending it, will feel a very sensible elevation of their gratitude, when they consider that adorable mercy, which, after they had justly forfeited their happiness, gave them a possibility of regaining it, in as transcendant a degree as if they had remained immaculate.

BUT however I may fail in representing the useful consequences of this hypothesis, as stimulative of devotion, its innocence is unexceptionable. It interferes not with the mysteries of our religion, neither
advances

advances an opinion which can vitiate human action. If it be objected that my labours have been useless, I am happy in knowing them to be innocent. For in favour of opinions allowed to be of evil tendency, I cannot think it any apology to alledge, that they are matters of speculation.

THE END.





PLAN OF REASONING.

INconsistent with the idea of a Being of perfect benevolence and justice, that he should form creatures with a power to make themselves unhappy, unless they had deserved such possibility of misery. - - *Page 1 to 8*

Impossible that sins committed in the space of human life should merit eternal punishment. - *8 to 17*

Predestination considered. Various opinions to account for the justice
or

of it. Impossible to reconcile it with human ideas of justice.

Page 17 to 21

To account sufficiently for it, it is necessary to suppose the commission of a crime greater than can be committed in the period of human life. Therefore in a state previous to it. - - 21 to 23

The body could not be concerned in this guilt, because mortal; therefore the soul. The soul eternal from the beginning, as well as to the end. The nature of the soul incongruous with the present state of things. The system of human existence includes the necessity of evil. The passions are the constituent principles of our nature.

nature. Those taken away, man does not remain. If there were a state of innocence, and a creature destined to inhabit it, that creature could not be man. There was a state of innocence. This state refers to the soul. *P. 23 to 29*

The theological account of the fall irreconcilable to human reason. God intended the human race should be procreated. Adam and Eve possessed the seeds of the lustful passions, and of the others. In a state of innocence they had been useless. Therefore they were intended for a state of sin. *29 to 34*

Moses not always to be understood literally. His account of the creation and fall allegorical. *34 to 46*

The

The fall of the Angels means what is
generally understood by the fall
of man. - *Page 46 to 63*

That Moses did not reveal this, no
objection. - - *63 to 68*

The Ancients had an hypothesis of
the pre-existence of souls. They
were able to support it only by
reason. We have a history ac-
knowledgeed to be divine, which
confirms and elucidates it. *68 to 71*

The innocence and benefits of this
hypothesis. - - *71 to the end.*

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